



CHNEP Policy Committee Meeting
Thursday May 22nd 2025, 9:00 am – 1:00 pm
Charlotte County Centennial Park Large Multipurpose Room
1120 Centennial Blvd., Port Charlotte, FL 33953

AGENDA

1. Call to Order and Introductions — Elizabeth Sweigert, Co-Chair
2. Agenda Additions or Deletions — Elizabeth Sweigert, Co-Chair
3. Public Comment on Agenda Items — Elizabeth Sweigert, Co-Chair
4. Policy Committee January 23, 2025 Meeting Minutes — Elizabeth Sweigert, Co-Chair
5. Hurricane Recovery Updates from the Federal Interagency Recovery Coordination (IRC) Team
— Leda Khoury, Federal Emergency Management Agency
6. CHNEP Update — Jennifer Hecker, CHNEP
7. CHNEP 5-year Program Evaluation — Elizabeth Sweigert, Co-Chair
8. Management Committee Report — Melynda Brown, Management Committee Co-Chair
9. FY 2026 Work Plans and Budgets — Jennifer Hecker, CHNEP
10. Water Quality Trends in Southwest Florida — Miles Medina, PhD, ECCO Scientific LLC
11. CHNEP Technical Projects Updates — Nicole Iadevaia, CHNEP
12. Policy Committee Member Updates — Elizabeth Sweigert, Co-Chair
13. Public Comment — Elizabeth Sweigert, Co-Chair
14. Future Meeting's Topics, Location and Date — Elizabeth Sweigert, Co-Chair
 - Upcoming Meetings: September 25, 2025 & January 22, 2026
15. Adjourn — Elizabeth Sweigert, Co-Chair

DIRECTIONS TO OUR MEETING LOCATION

[1120 Centennial Blvd, Port Charlotte, FL 33953](https://www.google.com/maps/place/1120+Centennial+Blvd,+Port+Charlotte,+FL+33953)



Coming from the North:

1. Take I-75 S to Sumter Blvd (exit 182) in North Port.
2. Follow Sumter Blvd for 8 miles to US Hwy 41 S, then Turn left onto US Hwy 41 S
3. Follow US Hwy 41 S for 4 miles to Centennial Blvd., then Turn right onto Centennial Blvd.
4. Follow Centennial Blvd. ½ mile down, turn **LEFT** into Centennial Park/Pool Parking Lot.
5. Check in at Front Desk and they will direct you to the Large Multipurpose Room

Coming from the South:

1. Take I-75 N to Kings Hwy in Charlotte County (exit 170)
2. Use the left 2 lanes to turn left onto Kings Hwy (signs for Port Charlotte/Charlotte Sports Pk)
3. Follow for ½ mile, then Use the right 2 lanes to turn right onto Veterans Blvd.
4. Follow for 7 miles, the Turn right onto US Hwy 41 N
5. Follow for 2 miles, then Turn left onto Centennial Blvd.
6. Follow Centennial Blvd. ½ mile down, turn **LEFT** into Centennial Park/Pool Parking Lot.
7. Check in at Front Desk and they will direct you to the Large Multipurpose Room

In-person Policy Committee meetings have resumed. If you are unable to attend in person (preferred), please email Jennifer Hecker at jhecker@chnep.org or call (941) 833-6580 for a virtual meeting link.

1. CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS

The CHNEP Policy Committee Co-Chair will call the meeting to order and then members will introduce themselves, followed by CHNEP staff and any members of the public who are participating.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS

If any Policy Committee member would like to make an addition or deletion to the agenda, this item is the time to suggest such.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS

Each participating member of the public is afforded up to 3 minutes total to speak on agenda topics only at this point in the meeting.

4. POLICY COMMITTEE JANUARY 23, 2025 MEETING MINUTES

This item is to review, offer any potential revisions, and approve final meeting minutes from the previous January 23, 2025 Policy Committee meeting.

Attachment: [Draft January 23, 2025 Meeting Minutes](#)
Action: Vote on approval of the minutes from January 23, 2025

5. HURRICANE RECOVERY UPDATES FROM THE FEDERAL INTERAGENCY RECOVERY COORDINATION (IRC) TEAM

The federal government Interagency Recovery Coordination (IRC) team, consisting of FEMA, US ACOE, USDA, US EDA, US EPA and other federal agencies attended the January CHNEP Management and Policy Committee meetings to personally listen to member comments with regards to the challenges they are facing with recovery from recent Hurricanes Helene and Milton. The IRC supports state, local, tribal, and territorial government in the development and pursuit of their resilient outcomes by providing federal recovery resources, technical assistance, and support. CHNEP member comments given at that time included recovery priorities, projects, status of current recovery efforts, and ideas that could help the community manage risks from future storms.

Following the meetings, verbal committee member comments were compiled by CHNEP staff into a document that was provided to the IRC with a request for short written IRC responses and contact information to send back out to the CHNEP member cities and counties. This in-person FEMA presentation is intended to follow up with responses and resources from them and other IRC federal recovery agencies that are working to assist local municipalities in the CHNEP region in their respective hurricane recovery efforts.

Highlights of actions taken by the Interagency Recovery Team since the hurricanes have been (1) Economic RSF Field Coordinator and EDA hosted (together with the Central and Southwest Florida Regional Planning Councils and the CHNEP) 8 FIRE Listening Sessions, (2) 227 pre-decisional project ideas, concepts, and notions generated based community input, (3) Community Assistance introductory meetings held with 22 counties and 39 communities/cities/towns, (4) Produced recommendations to provide long-term recovery planning support for 7 counties and 3 communities/town/cities, as well as capacity building for 6 counties and 1 town. (5) U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and FEMA cooperated in hosting Farm Recovery Centers in eight counties, with 215 Florida growers and producers assisted by the events, 100 local, state,

federal partner, and stakeholder entities attended, including: Florida Dept. of Emergency Management (FDEM), Farm Service Agency (FSA), USDA-Rural Development (RD), National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), and Small Business Association (SBA). (6) RSFs Field Coordinators continue to provide information and coordination about specific needs and resources from their respective federal agency, and the (7) IRC will continue to provide coordination with federal and non-federal partners based on specific recovery needs.

Leda Khoury from the Federal Emergency Management Agency will be presenting on this topic.

Attachments: [2024 Hurricane Recovery Comment Response Document](#)
[Marine Debris Emergency Response Guide](#)
[Federal Debris Management Programs](#)
[Federal Grant Resources](#)

6. CHNEP UPDATE

The following represents program activity highlights since the beginning of the Winter Management Conference cycle to the beginning of this one.

Program Administration

- Planned and executed both the Technical Advisory Committee Meeting (12/5), Citizens Advisory Committee meeting (12/18), Management Committee meeting (1/10), and Policy Committee meeting (1/23) including lining up presenters, drafting agenda packet, updating Committee webpage, creating PowerPoints, drafting minutes, etc.
- Sent on-boarding materials to two new Technical Advisory Committee members, John C. Morgan, an Environmental Supervisor for Sarasota County, and Mollie Holland, an Environmental and Community Resiliency Coordinator representing Charlotte County. Additionally, sent on-boarding materials to three new Citizens Advisory Committee members, Brooke Langston representing Manatee County, Cheryl Cook representing Sarasota County, and Zachary Franco representing Highlands County who were approved at the January Policy Committee Meeting.
- Sent on-boarding materials to new Management Committee member, Brandon Moody – Water Quality Manager representing Charlotte County. Additionally, sent on-boarding materials to seven new Policy Committee members, Commissioner Tim Wells, representing Hardee County, and Councilmember Jeannine Polk, representing the City of Punta Gorda, Becky Allenbach, representing the U.S. EPA and serving as the new Policy Committee Co-Chair, Commissioner Brian Hamman, representing Lee County, Commissioner Carol Ann Felts, representing Manatee County, Councilmember Joe Kilraine, representing the City of Cape Coral, and Commissioner Phil Stokes, representing the City of North Port. This included creating a new 2025 Policy Committee Briefing Book that is sent to provide orientation information to new Policy Committee members.
- Began drafting the CHNEP 2025 Program Evaluation and planning the May site visit.
- CHNEP held discussions at the Management and Policy Committee Meetings review information on partner responses, problems encountered, and lessons learned during Hurricanes Helene and Milton recovery. At their respective meetings, CHNEP Management and Policy Committees spoke with Interagency Recovery Coordination (IRC) team who were in attendance (this group included representatives from multiple federal agency staff posted in Southwest Florida to surveyed areas that were heavily impacted by 2024 Hurricanes and provide informational resources). Members of the committees gave feedback on resources needed to aid recovery time and had several

questions for the IRC team. These questions were compiled by CHNEP staff and sent to the IRC in February so they can provide follow up responses which will be shared with CHNEP Management Conference members.

- Updated all federal, state, county and city contact lists to reflect current elected leaders in CHNEP area, as well as their relevant staff. Began to contact federal legislative offices to obtain Programmatic Appropriations Forms to submit those available for FY26 federal funding.
- Co-hosted and facilitated the Southwest Florida Federal Interagency Resource Exchange (FIRE) and Economic Recovery Workshop listening session with the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council, which included creating agenda and PowerPoints, coordinating with federal representatives and inviting officials from the Partnership members. Afterward, videos from the listening session and notes summarizing the discussion were made available on the Hurricanes Milton and Helene recovery resources webpage on the CHNEP website: <https://www.chnep.org/hurricanes-milton-and-helene>.
- Drafted and sent a letter to new CHNEP member organization LeHigh Acres Municipal Services Improvement District (LAMSID) regarding their approval to joint CHNEP Management Conference at January Policy Committee Meeting and requesting which committees they would like to participate in.
- Drafted and sent a Letter of Support for Federal Designation of the Myakka Wild and Scenic River to the US National Park Service and Congressmen Buchanan and Steube's office following approval at the January Policy Committee Meeting.
- Sent out Spring budget reminder letters to all CHNEP partners (counties and cities) to ensure consideration of respective dues' amount in their respective FY26 budgets.
- Contacted federal legislative offices to obtain Programmatic Appropriations Forms, submitting those available for FY26 federal finding,
- Secured all 2026 meeting dates and venues and updated the website to reflect that information.

Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CCMP) Update

- Received initial CCMP layout for review.
- Received, reviewed and processed consultant invoice for finalization of CCMP Update and presentation to Management Conference.
- Completed final review for copy edits to word doc, edited with new preferred terminology and added reference to 2024 storm season impacts where appropriate in text and figure captions.
- Held meeting with consultant regarding the layout/design of 2025 CHNEP CCMP.
- Sent meeting notes and other items needed for CCMP layout including updated states for selected figures, updated GIS for selected map figures, photos from 2024 storm season, new cover photo, list of priority projects for photo selection in layout, and the original comments spreadsheet (highlighting specific photos and figures identified for updating or removal at start of project).
- Final electronic [2025 CCMP](https://www.chnep.org/our-plan) is available online at: <https://www.chnep.org/our-plan>. [Note: Table of Contents interactive so can click and be taken directly to sections of interest – including the “At A Glance” quick reference section near end of the document.]

Finance and Grants Management

- Processed and tracked annual contribution checks that have been received thus far.

- Ensured donation files are up-to-date and sent out acknowledgement letters for donors' tax records.
- Updated the [funding opportunities fact sheet](#) and sent out historic funding opportunities notification to all CHNEP Committees about a number of special large state and federal funding opportunities of interest.
- Processed sponsorship checks for the Annual Southwest Florida Resources Conference and the Cape Coral Burrowing Owl Festival.
- Drafted spreadsheet of revised codes for CHNEP accounts and projects to be entered into administrative hosts new financial software. This was sent to fiscal staff for review and approval.
- Successfully obtained commitment for \$5,000 sponsorship of upcoming CHNEP 2025 SW FL Resiliency Summit from the Volo Foundation.
- In response to EPA request, CHNEP worked with administrative host to provide response and additional documentation for the EPA BIL FY25 application. Approval of materials and EPA notice of EPA BIL FY25 grant award received.
- Received reimbursement from Southwest Florida Water Management District for staff support expenses incurred in FY24 in the amount of \$56,000.
- Submitted annual dues for continued membership in the Association of National Estuary Programs.
- Received, reviewed and processed project invoices for payment: Upper and Lower CCHMN Water Quality Sampling, CCMP Update, 2025 Nature Calendar printing mailing shipping and delivery.
- Prepared and submitted reimbursement request for the FY24 Upper CCHMN Water Quality Sampling Project to the Southwest Florida Water Management District.
- Processed a Change Order to the USF/ Water Atlas agreement for \$875. Additional budget is needed to cover the costs of programming the acquisition and display of the daily Chlorophyll-a layer on the Water Atlas maps.
- Held FY24 Close Out Finance Meeting with County grants staff.
- Finalized FY24 and FY25 Match Documentation for EPA 320 grants to keep on file.
- Drafted alternate FY25 work plans and budgets to address potential BIL funding changes and held meetings with County fiscal and grants staff to discuss federal funding pause and planning.
- Created preliminary list of Potential CHNEP/County Budget Adjustments & Project Account Strings needed and sent to County grants staff.
- Processed all private donations through checks and PayPal and updated the FY25 tracking spreadsheet as needed.
- Received FY25 grant agreements with Florida Department of Environmental Protection and Southwest Florida Water Management District, which were approved by Charlotte County and fully executed.
- Processed quarter 1 invoice for USF Water Atlas Project. Received the executed change order for purchase order for additional work associated with updating interactive map layers.
- Processed invoice from Lee County Environmental lab for post-storm event sample analysis.

- Submitted quarter 1 report and deliverables for the Upper CCHMN water quality monitoring project to the Southwest Florida Water Management District.
- Assisted in filling out a State Legislative Appropriations Request together with the other Gulf National Estuary Programs, which was filed (#2880) in both the House and Senate. Drafted and received three Letters of Support for the cities of Arcadia and Sanibel, as well as Strickland Ranch. Sent out email with information about it to the CHNEP Policy Committee and City/County Lists, as well as emails to each CHNEP legislative legislator on key committees where the request will be heard. Finally, presented the request at the Charlotte County Legislative Delegation meeting (2/28).

CHNEP staff participated in the following meetings:

- ANEP External Affairs Meetings (multiple)
- Hardee County-CHNEP Coordination Meeting (multiple)
- DeSoto County-CHNEP Coordination Meeting (multiple)
- Highlands County-CHNEP Coordination Meeting (multiple)
- Polk County-CHNEP Coordination Meeting (multiple)
- Charlotte County Vulnerability Assessment Monthly Meetings (multiple)
- Charlotte County Vulnerability Assessment Stakeholder Meetings (multiple)
- Southwest Florida Federal IRC Listening Session Meetings (multiple)
- CHNEP Water Atlas Monthly Meetings (multiple)
- Nutrients & Red Tide Symposium Committee Meetings (multiple)
- GOAA and Gulf Estuaries Collaboration Meetings (multiple)
- One Water One Commission Monthly Meetings (multiple)
- Southwest Florida Regional Ambient Monitoring Program (RAMP) Meetings (multiple)
- Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods Initiative Quarterly Meetings (multiple)
- GOAA Data & Monitoring Quarterly Meeting (12/9)
- Tampa Bay Estuary Program Open Science Subcommittee Meeting (12/10)
- Myakka River Management Coordinating Council Meeting (12/13)
- University of Florida Water Quality Post Hurricane Report Meeting (12/16)
- Lemon Bay Nutrient Management Planning (12/17)
- CHNEP Citizen's Advisory Committee Meeting (12/18)
- CHNEP Water Atlas Header Redesign Working Group (1/7)
- CHNEP & Sarasota County Resiliency Project Meeting (1/7)
- DeSoto County Underserved Community Meeting (1/7)
- Florida Economic RSF with Economic Recovery Partners Meeting (1/8)
- Hardee County Workshop AAAs & Underserved Communities Meeting (1/9)
- CHNEP Management Committee Meeting (1/10)
- Peace River Study Planning Meeting (1/13)
- SWFWMD Environmental Advisory Committee Meeting (1/14)
- CHNEP & Lee County Vulnerability Assessment Meeting (1/14)
- Vulnerability Assessment Risk/Sensitivity Methodology Meeting (1/14)
- Charlotte County Resiliency Working Group Kick-Off Meeting (1/15)
- Heal Our Harbor Ambassadors Training (1/22)
- CHNEP Policy Committee Meeting (1/23)
- CHNEP Water Atlas Automation of Master List Discussion Meeting (1/24)
- 34th Annual Southwest Florida Water Resources Conference (1/24)
- ANEP Communications Working Group Meeting (1/28)
- Lee County Parks Volunteer Association (1/29)

- Central Florida Federal Interagency Resource Exchange (FIRE) and Economic Recovery Workshop (1/30)
- Red Tide Mitigation & Technology Development Initiative Workshop (1/30-31)
- Everglades Coalition Conference (1/30-31)
- SEC Meeting (2/5)
- Central Florida Regional Planning Council Meeting (2/12)
- CHNEP CCMP Contractor Layout Meeting (2/13)
- Southwest Florida RPC Meeting (2/20)
- NOAA RESTORE Coastal Sportfish Ponds Team Meeting and Site Visit (2/24-2/25)
- Charlotte Board of County Commissioners Meeting (2/25)
- CHNEP Water Atlas Header Redesign Discussion Meeting (2/26)
- CHNEP Water Atlas Partners Meeting (2/27)
- Resilient Manatee Community Workshop Meeting (2/27)
- Charlotte County Legislative Delegation Meeting (2/28)
- Charlotte Harbor & Lemon Bay Seagrass Mapping Results Discussion Meeting (3/6)
- City of Punta Gorda Council Workshop Meeting (3/11)
- Southwest Florida Eco-Alliance Steering Team Meeting (3/12)
- Hardee County Vulnerability Assessment Steering Committee Meeting (3/13)
- Water Quality Playbook Update Meeting (3/14)
- Highlands County Vulnerability Assessment Steering Committee Meeting (3/21)
- Charlotte Harbor Algae Working Group Meeting (3/25)
- 2025 EPA-NEP Workshop Meeting (3/26)
- Southwest Florida Seagrass Working Group Meeting (3/26)

CHNEP Staff Presentations

- Prepared presentation for and presented “[Resiliency Lessons](#)” at the *Nature-Based Solutions Symposium* hosted by Conservancy of Southwest Florida - covering key takeaways from existing projects and pathways for moving forward with resiliency planning and projects.
- Presentation on CHNEP and *Landscape Scale Planning and Restoration to Heal Our Harbor* as a part of their annual Ambassador Training Program.
- Presentation on CHNEP and *Habitat Protection & Restoration* to Lee County Friends of Manatee Park volunteer association.
- Panelist presentation in the *Hurricane Recovery* session of the 34th Annual Southwest Florida Water Resources Conference.
- Presentation on CHNEP to [Central Florida Regional Planning Council](#).
- Gave opening remarks and facilitated session on [Fisheries & Agriculture](#) at Southwest Florida Federal Interagency Resource Exchange (FIRE) and Economic Recovery Workshop listening session.
- Presentation on [Nitrogen Contributions to Red Tide](#) journal article to the County Coalition for Responsible Management of Lake Okeechobee, the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee Estuaries, and Lake Worth Lagoon.
- Provided an update on CHNEP and partner projects related to the Peace River Watershed and bird conservation to the [Peace River Audubon Society](#).

Publications and Outreach Initiatives

- Sent out monthly Constant Contact emails to subscribers about relevant upcoming public engagement events in the CHNEP area.

- Continued making functional improvements to the CHNEP website including streamlining document uploading processes, adding to staff guidance document, and integrating an ArcGIS [home page map](#) in both mobile and desktop view. Also continued making website improvements that include: 1) Matching font style and size for Headers, Sub Headers and Body throughout- replacing selected font styles on non-matching pages with the brand tool kit font, 2) Making all Body Text Boxes the same width as home page, 3) On 'News' page, adding related photos from CHNEP drive to add interest, 4) Updating formatting on buttons, and 4) Checking formatting spacing and all edits on both desktop and mobile views.
- Provided photos of CHNEP projects for the 2023 NEP Accomplishments Report.
- Awarded two Conservation Grants for the FY25 winter cycle for the Myakka River Management Coordinating Council Website and the Lee County Hyacinth Control District Pond Watch Survey Tool.
- Created and published a new [Resources & Publications page](#) that is more intuitively organized for visitors and easier for staff to keep updated.
- Created an updated [Legislative Priorities page](#) for partners and citizens to access.
- Updated the [Community Resiliency page](#) to include details on CHNEP-funded components of Comprehensive Vulnerability Assessments in each of the ten service counties with relevant fact sheets.
- Attended the [Water, Wings, and Wild Things Kids Festival](#) at Circle B Bar Reserve in Polk County. Over 160 second graders (plus chaperones) visited the CHNEP booth to learn about unique Florida wildlife and how to care for the environment. Kids Activity Books and Nature Calendars were distributed to participants.
- Completed deliveries and shipments of the [2025 Nature Calendar](#) to partners through coordination with contractor. Received back-up documentation for shipping and deliveries, reviewed, held call with vendor, and processed all invoices and check requests for reimbursement to close out this project.
- Compiled notes for improving procurement and design of the 2026 Nature Calendar.
- Provided calendars, brochures, and Kids Activity Books to LA-MSID for the annual [Wings Over Water Festival](#).
- Created a NEP informational handout highlighting national assets (like national parks, airports, and principal ports) that the National Estuary Program helps to protect, for federal policymaker education.
- Displayed and distributed informational materials at the [SWFL Federal IRC Listening Session](#) for the 2024 Hurricane Season co-hosted by CHNEP.
- Attended the [Burrowing Owl Festival](#) in Cape Coral, where CHNEP manned a booth to share information with 478 visitors. Calendars and other printed educational materials were distributed, and visitors were encouraged to participate in an educational nature-based trivia game.
- Continued to foster engagement with our work through social media campaigns and the sharing of events such as for [I Heart Estuaries week](#), the [Great Backyard Bird Count](#), and [Valentine's Day](#).
- Shared collective [2024 achievements](#) from Florida's Gulf Coast NEP organizations on social media in a series of graphics.
- Attended the annual [Chalo Nitka Festival](#) in Moore Haven to host activities for visitors and distribute free resources.

- Attended the [Citizen Summit](#) in Punta Gorda to speak with attendees about CHNEP’s work and share free resources.
- Shared information about [World Seagrass Day](#) and [World Water Day](#) via social media.

Outreach Metrics

- 5,845 subscribers for CHNEP educational mailings
- 2,048 unique visitors and 2,727 page views of CHNEP website since last cycle
- 0 new Instagram followers for a total of 618
- 22 new Facebook followers for a total of 2,018
- YouTube: 13,266 Views (+1.2k), 88 Subscribers (+10), 325 Videos (+18)

Media/Press

- [Burrowing Owl fest provides fun, advocacy](#)
- [“They’re just trying to live”](#)
- [Nature-based solutions help address Florida’s climate challenges](#)
- [Five Reasons for Southwest Florida to Consider Nature-Based Solutions](#)
- [Hurricane Threats: Is there a plan to keep region safer?](#)

Jennifer Hecker, CHNEP Executive Director, will be presenting this item.

Attachment: [State and Federal Funding Opportunities Fact Sheet](#)

7. CHNEP 5-YEAR PROGRAM EVALUATION

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which is responsible for oversight and administration of the National Estuary Program (NEP) for all 28 organizations in it nation-wide, conducts a program evaluation (PE) of each NEP entity every five years. The CHNEP is currently undergoing a PE for activities it undertook in the 2019-2024 timeframe. To meet EPA PE guidance requirements, CHNEP staff prepared an extensive PE package document, which was submitted to the U.S. EPA. In response, EPA sent additional follow-up comments and questions and CHNEP responded both with written responses but also with a discussion held by teleconference.

The PE also encompasses a site visit with EPA personnel, which is being held May 20-22. The project site visits are related to the Lower Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods Hydrological Restoration Initiative, the Coastal Charlotte Harbor Monitoring Network, the DeSoto County Comprehensive Vulnerability Assessment Meeting, Myakka Headwaters Preserve Restoration Project, and the Warm Mineral Springs Restoration Project. EPA staff personally attending the site visits and this Policy Committee meeting include Noemi Mercado (US EPA HQ), Peggy Brown (US EPA HQ), Cindy Barger (US EPA HQ), Felicia Burks (US EPA Region IV), Katy Butler (US EPA HQ), Becky Allenbach (US EPA Region IV), and Curtis Bohlen, Executive Director of the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership (PE Peer NEP Reviewer Team Member) will also be in attendance.

Following this final step in evaluating the CHNEP, the US EPA, together with the peer NEP reviewer, will be finalizing a letter with its findings for the CHNEP Policy Committee and staff’s review and consideration. All indications from EPA communications thus far are that the CHNEP has not only met but exceeded EPA requirements for successfully passing its PE evaluation.

Noemi Mercado, CHNEP EPA Headquarters liaison and PE Team Lead will be presenting this item, together with other PE Team members.

Attachment: [2019-2024 CHNEP Program Evaluation Package](#)

8. MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

The CHNEP Management Committee met on May 9, 2025, chaired by Management Committee Co-Chair Melynda Brown. First after the standing Committee items was the Management Committee Co-Chair election for the open seat. One nomination was made and moved, Jamie Wolanin from Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. She was unanimously voted to be the Co-Chair for a two-year term, to chair alternately in tandem with the other current Co-Chair position.

Next the Committee heard the CHNEP Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) report from TAC Co-Chair Mark Walton, where he recapped the highlights from the April 10th meeting that was chaired by his Co-Chair Ernesto Lasso de la Vega. First was the TAC Co-Chair election, where Arielle Taylor-Manges of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection was unanimously elected to serve as the new Co-Chair. The TAC's first presentation was about the NOAA RESTORE Sportfish Restoration Project in Charlotte Harbor, which focuses on conserving vulnerable sport fish nursery habitats through land-use planning and decision-making tools. TAC Members were encouraged that the results of these studies may help with land-management decisions and can help create science-based decision support tools that can help guide habitat management decisions and urban planning to ensure environmental stability and economic resiliency at the county and state levels. Then Dr. Miles Medina from ECCO Scientific, LLC gave a presentation on Water Quality and Eutrophication Trends in Southwest Florida's Estuaries from 2000 to 2021 – a presentation that will be heard in this meeting as well. TAC members commented that elevated nitrogen levels were already present before Hurricane Irma, making ecosystems more susceptible to significant changes post-disasters. Members also noted the differences between the northern and southern segments of the study area regarding nitrogen sources and impacts, as well as that the discharges from Lake Okeechobee and its associated nitrogen loads are significant concerns for water quality in the region. Finally, Dr. Chris Anastasiou presented the 2024 Southwest Florida Water Management District Seagrass mapping results, which showed mostly declines in seagrass coverage. Future mapping efforts are scheduled for 2026, with discussions on the impact of nutrient removal versus restoration projects for improving seagrass health and water quality. Committee discussion included how as temperature and salinity may also be driving seagrass decline. TAC members discussed importance of prioritizing nutrient reduction initiatives such as septic-to-sewer projects. The agenda concluded with a Hurricane Recovery and Preparedness discussion and the standing CHNEP technical project and committee member updates.

The Committee then heard a Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC) report from CAC Co-Chair Harry Phillips, who also chaired the April 23rd meeting. The Committee began by holding its Co-Chair election, with Harry Phillips unanimously re-elected. Presentations were given by Madeline Aadnes and Dr. Ernesto Lasso de la Vega on the Citizen's Pond Watch Survey, funded through CHNEP's grant program. The survey enhances community awareness about local pond conditions and monitors seasonal dynamics through citizen science to improve pond health. CAC members expressed excitement over the Survey tool and discussed the potential for future data collection on the effectiveness of littoral zones in ponds, particularly in filtering toxins in retention ponds. CAC members also suggested an app as a more efficient data collection method, to replace the cumbersome paper forms currently used. Members were encouraged to leverage this template with their respective organizations, emphasizing the project's broader applicability and importance in environmental monitoring. The next presentation was from Sarina Weiss of the CHNEP, who discussed the CHNEP Water Atlas 2.0. The Atlas provides comprehensive information on over 600 waterbodies, organized by waterbody, basin, and watershed. It is

designed as a dynamic resource, incorporating new data and features to address environmental challenges and promote informed environmental decision-making. CAC members commented that it would be helpful to have tutorial videos on how to use the Atlas, which CHNEP is planning to work on over the summer. They are excited about the updated pages and expressed that the CHNEP Water Atlas is a wonderful resource for members and the public alike.

The Management Committee went on with its own agenda items, including the CHNEP update and then the FY2026 Work Plans and Budgets, an item coming before Policy this cycle. The Committee reviewed, discussed, and voted unanimously to recommend that the three new draft FY26 workplans and budgets be approved by the Policy Committee.

The Management Committee then heard from Leda Khoury of the Federal Emergency Management Agency on Hurricane Recovery Follow Up by the Federal Interagency Recovery Coordination (IRC) Team in response to the member comments on their recovery assistance needs after Hurricanes Helene and Milton. This presentation will also be made to the Policy Committee in this meeting. Ms. Khoury covered several funding sources still available to support recovery efforts. At the conclusion of presentation, Ms. Hecker of CHNEP added there is a CHNEP Committee comment/IRC response document is available online and provided in the meeting packets. With regards to a previous Committee comment that barrier island community leaders were concerned with the lowering of base floor elevation building standards, Ms. Khoury added the state provided the LIDAR that FEMA relied upon to lower the base floor elevations. Another member mentioned receiving a letter from the Office of Enhancement and Budget and it seemed to indicate that FEMA is recommending material changes to the disaster declaration's economic thresholds which could put the burden on local and state governments. Management members also asked and commented about coordination, funding, and other aspects of recovery assistance. Ms. Khoury said she would follow-up with them once she had coordinated with colleagues in the IRC to respond.

The next presentation was by Dr. Miles Medina, from ECCO Scientific, LLC, which again is being covered in this meeting. Management Committee heard the presentation and members expressed they hoped there was funding to do the analysis of the last few years of data, particularly for the Caloosahatchee River system which should be different now due to changes in Lake Okeechobee management. CHNEP staff mentioned that there is a time lag in getting newer data, due to it going through quality assurance process, but hope to fund and do that in near future. Dr. Medina mentioned now that this is developed, it should go faster going forward. Another member mentioned this information as being helpful to inform seagrass restoration efforts, to ensure that restoration is targeted to where water quality is able to support seagrass persistence and growth. The Management Committee meeting concluded with the standing technical project updates and member updates items.

Management Committee Co-Chair Melynda Brown will be presenting this item.

9. FY 2026 WORK PLANS AND BUDGETS

For fiscal year 2026, CHNEP has prepared three annual work plans and budgets: a CHNEP Master Work Plan and Budget, an EPA320 Workplan and Budget, and an EPA Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) Work Plan and Budget. All three grants work plans and budgets are written based on assumption both FY26 EPA grants will be awarded, since these workplans are required in order to outline how those grants funds are planned to be used.

This agenda item is to present highlights of the various Work Plans and Budgets as well as comments from the Management Committee to the Policy Committee for approval. Once these are approved by Policy, the final EPA320 Workplan and Budget and EPA Infrastructure

Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) Workplan and Budget will accompany the FY26 EPA application forms in Grants.gov before the June 1, 2025 grant application deadline.

Major changes from FY25 approved work plan and budget to proposed FY26 are as follows:

- Personnel using prior year federal EPA 320 carryover funding and new state (FDEP, SWFWMD) and local funding. This is due to uncertainties regarding new federal grant awards, as well as expends older funds first if FY26 EPA grants are awarded. [Note that at present FY26 EPA 320 grant looks probable (at same \$850k as last year), though with new onerous grant terms and conditions that allow funds to be rescinded post-award without any wrongdoing by grantee. FY26 EPA IIJA grant award is more uncertain; if awarded would be same \$909,800 as last year and would be last year of that extra authorized funding.]
- Partner contributions have increased by \$10,000 overall, due to Polk County increasing their dues, matching many other CHNEP counties at the \$25,000 level – thank you Polk County!
- Personnel costs were decreased from \$669,810 to \$525,000 to eliminate two unfilled entry-level positions; a Finance and Grants Specialist and a Restoration Specialist - decreasing authorized personnel from 7 positions to 5. This involves the redistribution of those duties across the remaining positions, which is at full capacity given the continuing additional IIJA projects to manage.
- Overhead Administrative Fees have slightly decreased from \$256,869 to \$246,120 due to the reduction of authorized CHNEP positions and associated human resource, information technology, and other associated operational support costs.
- Public Outreach is decreased from \$106,321 to \$94,500 in reducing sponsorships by \$5,000, increasing CHNEP Publications from \$50,107 to \$55,000 to account for rising print and shipping costs (though contingent on FY26 EPA 320 funding), and CHNEP Events going from \$16,214 down to \$4,500.
- Non-IIJA Research and Restoration is increased from \$442,875 to \$947,821, though the majority of this is contingent on FY26 EPA 320 funding. IIJA Research and Restoration is increasing from \$899,800 to \$909,800 (contingent on FY26 IIJA grant award).
- Once new awards are received and accepted by host, CHNEP would issue a call for projects for the TBD Research and Restoration funds – with an emphasis this year on Clean Water Research and Restoration projects given the current priorities of the EPA. Three already identified projects for FY26 (contingent on the FY EPA grant awards) are the Peace River Basin Water Pollution Hotspot Assessment, the Submerged Aquatic Vegetation and Water Quality Restoration, and the CHNEP Water Atlas Improvements projects. Detailed descriptions and costs estimates for each of these can be found in the individual task description narratives of each project in the work plan.
- Annual amount of added reserves increased from \$51,500 to \$62,000. The current reserve balance is \$739,641.59, so is anticipated to be \$801,641.59 at the end of FY26.
- Based on recent EPA guidance, the FY26 EPA 320 Work Plan and Budget will be handled like the EPA IIJA Work Plan and Budget, in only including budget tables and task descriptions relative to monies and projects funded by those grants. The master Work Plan and Budget that CHNEP has traditionally done is still prepared and presented to show all funding and expenses for purposes of authorization by the Policy Committee for staff implementation of how to expend state, local and other funding in addition to the EPA federal funding.

Jennifer Hecker, CHNEP Executive Director, will present this item.

Attachments: [Draft FY26 Master Work Plan and Budget](#)
[Draft FY26 EPA 320 Work Plan and Budget](#)
[Draft FY26 EPA IJA Work Plan and Budget](#)

Actions: Vote to approve the CHNEP FY26 Master, EPA 320, and IJA work plans and budgets

10. WATER QUALITY TRENDS IN SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

Effective management and restoration of coastal and estuarine systems requires an understanding of changes in water quality and aquatic bioindicators over time. Recently, researchers and technical experts (including CHNEP staff) partnered to analyze twenty years of water quality data for trends in nitrogen, phosphorus, chlorophyll-a, oxygen, organic carbon concentrations and apparent color in the upper water column samples from southwest Florida of estuaries between 2000 and 2021, based on monthly sampling through the Coastal Charlotte Harbor Monitoring Network (CCHMN) water quality monitoring program. For each water quality parameter at each of 13 monitoring areas, a generalized additive model (GAM) was used to identify trends over a sliding 5-year window. Those trends were compared against water quality thresholds for those waterbodies and changes in seagrass coverage and macroalgal abundance over the same time 22+ time period.

This in-person presentation by the lead author of this recent scientific published article is to present historic and recent water quality, seagrass, and macroalgae conditions in all the estuaries and coastal waters from Venice to Bonita Springs, FL. This information informs needed management actions for water quality improvement and aquatic habitat restoration.

Dr. Miles Medina from ECCO Scientific LLC will be presenting this item.

Attachments: Medina et. al, 2025. [Water Quality Trends and Eutrophication Indicators in a Large Subtropical Estuary: A Case Study of the Greater Charlotte Harbor System in Southwest Florida](#). Estuaries and Coasts (2025). 48:56.
[Water Quality Trends in Southwest Florida Summary Fact Sheet](#)

11. CHNEP TECHNICAL PROJECTS UPDATES

This item will be an overview on research and restoration projects recently completed or currently underway with CHNEP FY22-25 funds since the last meeting. Project fact sheets are available on the CHNEP website: <https://www.chnep.org/resources>.

Nicole Iadevaia, CHNEP Director of Research & Restoration, will be presenting this item.

12. POLICY COMMITTEE MEMBER UPDATES

Each member will have time to update the Committee on actions their entity is taking to protect and restore natural resources in the CHNEP area. This time also serves as an opportunity for members to make announcements or discuss other topics of interest to the Committee members.

Policy Committee Co-Chair Elizabeth Sweigert will be leading and facilitating this item.

13. PUBLIC COMMENT

Each participating member of the public is afforded up to 3 minutes total to speak at this point in the meeting.

14. FUTURE MEETING'S TOPICS, LOCATION AND DATE

Please mark your calendar for upcoming in-person Policy Committee Meetings on September 25, 2025, January 22, 2026, May 28, 2026, September 17, 2026 at the same Centennial Park location.

15. ADJOURN